

"The wood from which the bows are made is a variety of chonta palm, called síri. This tree, when mature, is about 12 inches in diameter and has a layer about 2 inches thick of very hard, black wood just underneath the bark. It is from this layer that the bow is constructed. Although the material is relatively abundant in the environment, before making a new bow a hunter will search for some time to locate a chonta tree which has the appearance of being of proper maturity and hardness. It is a rare tree that has just the right qualities. The wood must be firm and resilient and must withstand the maximum pulling strength of the hunter without breaking. Frequently I have seen a man spend a couple of days in the construction of a bow only to have it snap on the first pull.

After a suitable tree has been sighted it is felled. I have never seen this done other than with an ax, but one of my oldest informants told me that he had known chonta palms to be felled by building a fire against the trunk until the hard layer had been burned through and then pushing the tree over. When a tree has been felled, a section of the circumference of the trunk, about 4 inches wide and as long as the hunter wants his bow to be, is cut out. Other smaller pieces of chonta may also be removed at this time, as this material is likewise indispensable in the construction of arrows."

"Once the material has been taken out, work on the construction of the bow begins almost at once, before the wood dries out. Bows are plain and are made of a single stave. The making of a bow is a laborious process, as it is fashioned almost entirely by using mollusk shells, called urúkwa, to plane the wood down. A small hole is first made in the surface of one of these mollusk shells. The edges around the hole are then worked downward with the grain, and the section of wood is gradually planed to the desired shape. If a man possesses a machete, he may first use this to give the bow its approximate shape by roughly tapering the horns, but the finishing is always done with the shell to avert the danger of splitting the wood. In planing down a bow it is held securely on the ground between the big and the second toe. [15]

In cross section a bow is roughly oval in shape, being about 2 inches in diameter in the middle and gradually tapered to a cross section of about a quarter of an inch at the horns. The inner side of the hard layer of the tree forms the belly of the bow, while the bark side forms its back. After a bow has been worked to the desired shape a small amount of bark fiber from the ambaibo tree is wrapped around each horn to keep the string from slipping toward the limbs. The horns of the bow are not notched to hold the string."

"A chonta-headed arrow is made in the following way. A shank of chonta wood about 8 inches in length, pointed at both ends, and of a diameter so as just to fit the hollow distal end of the reed, is fashioned with a mollusk shell called urúkwa. About one-half of this shank is coated with prepared beeswax called iriti and inserted up the hollow shaft for about 6 inches. The part of the shaft containing the shank is then loosely bound with ambaibo bark fiber and left to dry. While it is drying, a small conical plug (eája), likewise coated with hot beeswax, is inserted in the proximal end of the reed. This plug contains the nock of the arrow. After both have dried, the chonta shank and the plug containing the shaft are bound securely in place. This is done with fine cotton string which has been previously coated with paint made from ground seeds of uruku (Bixa orellana) mixed with saliva. To bind the shank, the arrow maker removes the bark fiber and begins to wind cotton string around the shaft about 4 or 5 inches from the distal end, continuing his winds downward until about 3 inches of the protruding shank have been covered; to bind the plug, he begins to wind cotton string around the shaft from the proximal end, continuing his winds about 3 or 4 inches down the shaft. The ends of the string used for lashing are coated with beeswax to hold them in place."

"A single barb (erási), about one-half inch in length, is lashed onto the chonta shank of an arrow about half an inch from the point. Barbs are generally made from the hard stays which grow in the soft wood in the center of a palm tree which the Siriono call hindoéra, although chonta wood is also used sometimes. The barb is flattened on one end and lashed securely to the shank with fine cotton string coated with beeswax.

Bamboo-headed arrows are made in almost [17] exactly the same way as chonta-headed arrows except that the bamboo head is lashed onto a chonta shank that is flattened on the distal end. Nowadays, bamboo arrowheads are cut out with bush knives, but formerly they were shaped with mollusk shells. They are glued to the flattened chonta shank with beeswax and lashed tightly to it with cotton string covered with uruku paint."